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SUBJECT: BENIN: DEPUTIES PASS BILLS ON THE PERMANENT COMPUTERIZED
VOTER REGISTRY (LEPI)

REF: COTONOU 124 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) SUMMARY: National Assembly deputies set the legal framework for the Permanent Computerized Voter Registry (LEPI) by adopting two bills necessary for its implementation. President Yayi is expected to promulgate the bill to allow the start of the LEPI. The elements for the implementation of the LEPI are in place, except for funding. The GOB depends heavily on Technical and Financial Partners' (TFPs) contributions to proceed with the LEPI. TFPs have not yet raised the entire estimated USD 32 million budgeted for implementation. END SUMMARY.

Deputies approved Permanent Computerized
Voter Registry (LEPI) project

12. (U) On May 4, Deputies approved by majority vote a bill on the design of the LEPI and on the National Extended Electoral Census (RENA). The approved bill on the implementation of the LEPI contains 52 articles providing the administrative, technical and legal framework for the LEPI. The RENA will allow citizens from age 8, who do not possess birth certificates, to be issued them during public outreach sessions coordinated by the Ministry of Justice. In addition, citizens should be at least 12-years old to be registered on the LEPI because updating will be performed every ten years. The LEPI bill also provides for the creation of an Independent Mission for National Autonomous Census (MIRENA), a technical agency that will be responsible for designing the LEPI. According to Helene Aholou Keke, the President of the National Assembly's Committee on Law, the LEPI is designed to reinforce the credibility of Benin's electoral process through reducing the practice of electoral fraud likely to spark electoral violence.

13. (U) Prior to the adoption of this bill, on April 27, National Assembly deputies examined and, after heated debate, unanimously approved the bill on the protection of personal data in the Republic of Benin, which is a prerequisite for the design of the LEPI. The bill is meant to secure voters' personal information in order to reduce the risk of the fraudulent use of biometric details. Deputies also proposed a National Computer and Public Liberties Committee that would supervise personal data collection efforts on the ground. The two approved bills are expected to expedite the implementation of the LEPI so as to meet the deadline of March 2011. However, President Yayi will need to sign the bills into law for their actual application. It is noteworthy that a network of Civil Society organizations, group FORS LEPI, lobbied for the adoption of the bill in the parliament.

GOB awaits Technical and Financial
Partners' assistance but...

¶4. (SBU) During an April 23 meeting attended by Poloff at the UNDP office in Cotonou, TFPs expressed concerns regarding four main issues related to the bill on the LEPI. First, the requirement imposed by the GOB that the fingerprints be ten-prints rather than the original left thumb will extend operation time. Second, the decision to hire three-member teams rather than two will imply provision of additional kits as they will need more door-to door teams to work in the compressed time frame. Third, the decision to take the census of citizens aged 8 rather than citizens aged 10 as mentioned in the initial report will increase the number of people to register and likely require an extension of the deadline. Fourth, the proposed registration of Beninese Diaspora as part of the RENA will add complexity to the process.

¶5. (SBU) Technical and Financial Partners concerns stemmed from the fact that the requirements contained in the bills would incur a substantial increase in the budget for the LEPI. It was pointed out that TFPs have not yet gathered the initial estimated USD 32 million budget for the LEPI. TFPs sent a letter to the Minister in Charge of Relations with the Institutions, Zakari Baba Body, urging him to lobby deputies for amending the bill on the LEPI prior to approval. A source from the National Assembly told Post that deputies did bring amendments to the bills at plenary session before adoption, which could maintain the estimated budget at its current level. Post was not able to check the information because the approved bills are not published.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: By adopting the bills on the LEPI, parliamentarians have made giant strides towards its implementation. The public has hailed parliamentarians for demonstrating their commitment to transparent elections. Still, there is a long way to go to complete the LEPI before the 2011 presidential and legislative

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elections. The GOB and civil society need to maintain this level of interest and action over the long haul. END COMMENT.

BROWN